

## **THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

Oct. 27/28 – 2012

Jeremiah 31: 7-9; Hebrews 5: 1-6; Mark 10: 46-52

### Introduction

A man took quite ill one night. His wife called the local doctor who came to their home. After the doctor had gone in to examine the man he came out and asked for a corkscrew. A few minutes later he came out again and asked for a pair of pliers. Not long after, he asked the wife to get him a chisel and hammer quickly. By now the woman was really worried, and she asked: "What's wrong with my husband, Doctor?" The doctor said: "I don't know yet; I can't get my instrument bag open." People speak of "breaking open" the Scriptures to get a closer look at their meaning. I want to break open two powerful images that appear in today's *readings*, the image of a *journey* and the image of *blindness*.

### The Journey

In 722 B.C. the northern kingdom of Israel was invaded by the Neo-Assyrians. Many of the inhabitants were carried into captivity. It was a cruel exercise. The invading army forced people to march over rough roads. Those who were weak or sick or blind stumbled and fell. Most of them were simply left to die by the roadside. It is the kind of scene that is all too familiar in today's world. There were terrible examples of it during the Second World War. There were frightful death marches carried out by the Kmer Rouge in Cambodia in the 1970's. There were similar scenes in Bosnia and more recently in Darfur.

The journey pictured by the prophet Jeremiah in today's *first reading* is very different. The prophet announces that God is going to bring his people back home. This time however the roads will be smooth and straight. Water and food will be provided along the way. There will be special care for the lame, the blind, the pregnant mothers, so they can make the journey in comfort. It is a wonderful image of God's loving care.

The image raises important questions for us. All of us are journeying through this world together. What do we make that journey like for other people? Do we act like the Assyrians or the Kmer Rouge or the oppressors of Darfur, selfishly pursuing our own goals, concentrating simply on our own agenda, and not caring too much who falls by the wayside in the process? Or do we imitate God, doing all we can to make life's journey a happy one for those around us, and showing special concern for those who find the journey difficult because of poverty, misfortune or unemployment, for example.

As we carry out the business of our daily life, how do we treat the other members of our family? Is their life better because we are part of it or do we cause them unhappiness? How do we deal with the people we meet as we go about our business each day? Do we take them for granted, act rudely with them? As we get out on the road, how do we treat other drivers? Finally, a very important question, do we pay any attention to the needs of the human family here in our own country and also in other parts of the world, people suffering from hunger, violence, illness? Do we simply dismiss them from our thoughts or do we see them as brothers and sisters who deserve mercy and justice?

### Blindness

When we look more closely at today's Gospel we see that St. Mark intends the blind man to be a lesson for all of us. This man calls Jesus "Son of David". It is a messianic title. Ironically, he, though blind, sees who Jesus really is, while those with physical sight do not. He asks, not for a special place in Our Lord's kingdom, like James and John last week, but simply to receive his eyesight back. While others ignore Jesus, this man, once cured, follows him.

Blindness affects all of us. Many people looking back at the causes of the Second World War wonder how political leaders then could have been so blind and failed to see what was coming. The inquiry into Canada's tainted blood tragedy, and the judicial study of unsafe water in Walkerton a few years ago, and the revelations of sexual abuse in our own church, have all illustrated how easy it is to be blind to what is going on. Perhaps most tragically each of us, taken up with the concerns of daily life, can be blind to what God is doing in our own life, to Our Lord's invitations to us, to the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit to lead us on the road of goodness and generosity.

When we are spiritually blind, it is not only we who lose out as a result, but also our society, because the Lord, in giving us the gift of faith, has called us to be watchmen, people who call attention to the dangers in our culture. By contrast, what good we do for others when we really look and see through the mindlessness and falsity of so much that is presented on television, in the movies, in the world of entertainment, and when we question many of the values that our culture takes for granted. Fr. John Coleman, an American sociologist said not long ago that our Catholic Social Teaching is incompatible with three elements of our culture: consumerism, that is, putting a higher value on having than on being; individualism, giving priority to self at the exclusion of others; and romance with technology, which stresses techniques rather than goals. How important it is that our lives be truly counter-cultural in these areas!

### Conclusion

I want to finish with a true story. Many years ago there was a man you couldn't help but notice on downtown streets because of his physical problems. He walked funny. He talked funny. He slobbered all the time. Many found him an embarrassment and shunned him. However a priest I knew befriended this man and discovered in him a person of great intelligence and talent. In fact the man became a respected music composer. Similarly the blind man in today's *Gospel* was an embarrassment to people. They didn't like his loud shouting and tried to shush him up. Yet he was wiser than any of them. So too, being faithful to our Christian vocation may make us an embarrassment to others at times, may single us out in some ways, but we will be bearing witness to the truths that our world needs very much to hear.